Responsibilities and Obligations for Quality Assurance

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Purpose

Quality Assurance (QA) provides timely, independent and objective reviews of projects, their progress and their difficulties including but not limited to an assessment of the quality of deliverables. This document is intended to serve as a model for procurement and contract language, facilitating a consistent approach across state government. The goal is to establish common expectations among state agencies, QA vendors, the Department of Information Services (DIS) and the Information Services Board (ISB), about the role of QA under Portfolio-based Information Technology (IT) Management and Oversight.

This *Responsibilities and Obligations for Quality Assurance* document is the work product of the Quality Assurance Summit convened on May 29, 1998 in Olympia, WA. It is intended to reflect the consensus view of representatives of the QA vendor community (CASE, CIS, Cotey, MTG, R&G, Spectrum, Sterling), the public sector IT community (Corrections, Employment Security, Office of Financial Management (OFM), General Administration, Health, Information Services, Labor and Industries, Licensing, Revenue, State Patrol), and those with statutory responsibility for the stewardship of IT resources, the Legislative Evaluation and Accountability Program (LEAP), OFM, DIS, and ISB.

Statutory Authority

The provisions of RCW 43.105.041 detail the powers and duties of the ISB, including the authority to develop statewide or interagency information services and technical policies, standards and procedures.

Scope

This policy applies to all executive and judicial branch agencies and educational institutions, as provided by law, that operate, manage, or use IT services or equipment to support critical state business functions.

Exemptions

None.

Policy

Quality Assurance (QA), when required on projects within Portfolio-based Information Technology Management and Oversight, will be procured and conducted in a manner consistent with the following principles:

1. **Purpose** - QA serves the wider public interest of assuring accountability for taxpayer funded information technology projects. To that end, QA provides a common source of reliable information to those charged with the oversight of projects. For those projects requiring external quality assurance, agencies and QA contractors agree to adopt the principles of *Responsibilities and Obligations for Quality Assurance* document and its related policies.

2. **Relationships** - QA professionals provide ongoing advice, counsel and recommendations to a project team, steering committee and/or executive sponsor while refraining from the performance of implementation activities or advocacy on behalf of projects to external stakeholders. The first loyalty of a QA professional is to the business purpose being addressed through the IT project – not individual stakeholders, preferred solutions, methodologies or other interests.

3. **Documentation** - QA Plans are required for all projects requiring QA. The QA plan should address all factors related to the successful completion of a project and its integration with the agency and state information technology infrastructure. Prior to an engagement, and as part of the QA plan, the roles and responsibilities of QA providers are to be clearly defined and mutually agreed upon by the agency, the provider and approval authorities as appropriate. Specifically, the plan will address reporting relationships and governance, including but not limited to issue escalation and resolution.

4. **Deliverables** - Formal QA reporting is established in the QA plan. It is done at appropriate intervals and/or around major milestones, and addresses whether deliverables are acceptable, whether sufficient progress is being made to meet upcoming milestones; whether milestones are met on schedule; and, once met, the level of agency preparedness for subsequent phases.

5. **Distribution** - The content of formal QA reports is consistent and provided in a timely manner to all key decision makers as defined under IT Portfolio Management, including, but not limited to the agency executive sponsor; project steering committees; and project teams; the ISB; the executive and oversight staff of DIS; and OFM. The ISB and agency executives provide status reports (and copies of formal QA reports as appropriate) to the Legislative fiscal committees at appropriate intervals or as required

by statute.

6. **Expertise** - Procurements for QA services will require contractors to demonstrate their qualifications to perform quality assurance, including but not limited to professional credentials, previous recent experience with similarly scoped projects, and access to the necessary staff and resources.

7. **Compensation** - Compensation for QA consultants shall be structured to ensure objectivity by making it independent of project duration. Compensation should be funded by the project but paid as a separate and discrete element. If during the course of a project, the project plan is modified the QA plan and QA compensation agreement must also be reviewed and modified as appropriate. Early project completion, project scope reduction or cancellation based on sound QA advice and reporting should not create a disincentive against the objectivity of the QA consultant.

8. **Conflict Avoidance** - Agency heads will ensure that procurement documents and contracts address conflicts of interest pursuant to Chapter 52.52 RCW, such that firms do not provide QA on projects on which they are concurrently engaged in the development process. Consulting services provided prior to the funding of a project (including but not limited to feasibility studies, needs assessment and project planning) are not considered QA. However, vendors must declare all prior involvement in the pre-funding stages of a project, in responding to procurements for QA services for the funded project. The selection of such a company as the apparently successful vendor is contingent on a review by the agency head and contractual provisions to address potential conflict of interest.

9. **Expectations** - QA professionals, in consultation with the sponsoring agency, adopt a disciplined methodology in the project plan for monitoring projects that is consistent with the *Responsibilities and Obligations for Quality Assurance*. QA plans establish standard benchmarks against which project progress can be measured and set forth the functionality requirements for each phase of a project and include the following criteria – benefits, costs, risks, and organizational readiness to proceed with the next phase.

Related Policy

[Executive Guide to Managing Information Technology Portfolios](#)

Maintenance

Technological advances and changes in the business requirements of agencies will necessitate periodic revisions to policies, standards, and guidelines. The Department of Information Services is responsible for routine maintenance of these to keep them current. Major policy changes will require the approval of the ISB.